

Untold Italy Episode 162 - 5 Reasons to Plan an Italy trip in Spring

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 162.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy

Ciao friends. Today I want to paint you a picture of a stunning stone hilltop town with higgledy-piggledy streets and laneways weaving in and out of one another, domed church rooftops and hidden piazzas where flower pots have burst into bloom. Fresh breezes waft through laundry and the aroma of lunches to come are in the air. The sky is as clear blue as it could be and the odd fluffy cloud floats into view.

Continue a little further down through this town and you reach a magnificent garden, one of the finest in Italy, where palm trees blend with the bright pink hues of the Judas tree whose blossoms carpet the ground all around. This is Spring in Sicily and it's absolutely gorgeous.

Spring is one of my favorite times of year to visit Italy and today I'm going to share the reasons why. I'm also going to let you know a few favorite places, like Ragusa, the place I just described before, that are exceptionally lovely to visit in the Spring time.

And it should be no surprise that these are some of the places we visit on our Untold Italy small group tours to take full advantage of all the aspects I'm going to mention in a minute.

Katy

So the first reason why I love to travel to Italy in the springtime is for the weather. It's perfect weather for sightseeing and eating pasta. So do you love walking? I do. And that's a good thing because there is a lot of walking to be done when you're in Italy. It's pretty easy to do 20,000 steps a day without even really trying. But walking isn't as fun when it's stinking hot and you're surrounded by buildings that soak up the sun's rays and pump it out through their walls like radiators. Last year, I arrived in Rome in Mid May and the temperatures were already 30 degrees Celsius, or that's around 86 Fahrenheit, I believe, in Rome, and that continued until mid October. Now, we made it work, of course, but most days I wasn't really feeling like eating a hearty pasta or having a glass of red wine, which you have to admit are probably some of the reasons you're headed to Italy in the first place. Having traveled to various parts

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of the country in March and April on many occasions, I can tell you that the fresh days of around 18 to 20 degrees Celsius, which is mid 60s Fahrenheit in Rome, Central Italy, and the South are just perfect for me

Katy

Walking is pleasurable, and if there is the odd rain shower, it's exactly that. I really find that the weather settles in like it does in other parts of Europe. And if there is a shower, it's the perfect time to duck into a trattoria and enjoy your hearty pasta and a glass of Chianti. Also, don't forget that in the springtime, you get an extra hour of daylight to add to your exploring. Clocks go forward in late March, so the days are longer, but you don't yet have the heat of the summer. Perfetto.

Katy

So the second reason why I love to travel to Italy in the springtime is that there are fewer visitors, which means more fun times. I did a quick bit of research to back up my statement that the crowds are much bigger in summer in Italy and found that in fact, visitor numbers in June are double those in March. And guess what? That continues up until August and September through those months. And it's largely due to not just intercontinental travelers like us from America and Australia and Canada, but it's also from other parts of Europe. A lot of Europeans love to go to Italy for their holidays in the summer.

Katy

The population swells beyond all imagination. Typically, they're all concentrated in a few areas, and those areas are, I'll have you guess, it's Rome, Florence, Venice, parts of Tuscany, the Cinque tere, and the Amalfi Coast. They're the places that are going to be most crowded when the visitor numbers are high. So if you've been listening along to this podcast for a while, you'll know that I am not a big fan of crowds and lines. And honestly, they make me feel a bit anxious and I can't seem to find enough space to enjoy the things that I'm traveling to do and see. Not everyone is like me, but if that sounds like you, Spring might be a better time for you to visit Italy, especially those favorite tourist hotspots that I mentioned, because the crowds will be much, much lower then.

Katy

Now, the third reason to visit Italy in Springtime is one of those hip pocket ones that is pretty important, I think, and that's better deals. Of course, the simple laws of supply and demand will tell you that when there's high demand and visitor numbers, prices go up, especially for flights and accommodation, which are your biggest cost when traveling usually.

Katy

Travel in Spring and you can find much better deals on your hotels and inbound flights, which means you can stay longer (hooray) or upgrade yourself for a little treat. I'm always watching flight costs on both Google Flights and Sky Scanner, which are two online tools which are worth having a look at. And it's worth doing this for whenever you're traveling. But you'll also notice quickly the spike in prices in summer and deals around the shoulder seasons. Everyone loves a great deal, don't they? So I think travel is one of the most expensive activities you can do. It's also one of the most amazing. So if you can save a few dollars here or there, it can make a big difference.

Katy

The fourth reason I love to travel to Italy in the Springtime is the vibes. There's much better vibes, there's festivals and fun. And so having lived in Europe a third of my adult life, I noticed just how dramatically the collective mood changes when spring comes to town. Everyone smiles more and throws themselves into being outdoors and enjoying the sunshine. Flowers are in full bloom. And if you're lucky enough to be in the Tuscan or Umbrian countryside, you can see fields of poppies, irises, and wildflowers carpeting the landscapes. In Sicily, too, the wildflowers are absolutely incredible. One of the most popular places to visit is Florence. And there in Springtime, you're in for a real treat as the city's iris garden, which is home to well over a thousand varieties, is open, but it's only open for 20 days in April and May. And you'll find it on the opposite side of Piazzale Michelangelo to the rose garden, which is open all year round. The iris garden is not only stunning, but it's an important part of the city as the iris is the symbol of Florence appearing on its coat of arms. Italy has many, many beautiful gardens worth exploring in the spring, apart from the one in Florence. You can go to the Italian Lakes, the Villas of Como, and in Garda they have some absolutely stunning gardens that you can visit. And one of the most absolutely spectacular is Isola Bella in Lake Maggiore. Another place that you might like to go if you love wandering through beautifully manicured gardens is Villa d'Este near Rome, and also the splendor of the immense estate at the Palace of Caserta, close to Naples.

Katy

Of course, it is also Easter time, which is a very important time of year for Italians. And there are many processions and activities across the Easter weekend. We spent one Easter in Sicily, and it was so memorable. The days are marked by very special details. Bread and cakes are only made at that time of year, marzipan lambs, huge processions of wooden floatings representing the resurrection and saints, and of course, the feasting to follow. In Florence, Easter is marked by the Scoppio del Carro or explosion of a cart, where a cart laden with fireworks is ignited outside the Duomo in a noisy and colorful display whose origins date back to the crusades. These ancient rituals are incredibly special and unique and much more symbolic and emotional than our gaudy rush for shiny chocolate eggs (though I do like that too, I have to admit). In the tourism industry in Italy, the operators have had a decent rest

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over winter and they're ready to get out and about with their clients and have a great time ahead of the six month season ahead of them. Everyone is in a good mood in Springtime.

Katy

And the final reason I like to visit Italy in Springtime, and it's a very good one actually, are all the spring foods that are available. And of course, you know by now that food in Italy is seasonal and local, so spring is a very exciting time to visit because there are lots of new dishes that are around. And at this time, the artichokes are fresh in Rome, and the carciofi dishes are super delicious because the artichokes are juicy and fresh. You'll get asparagus in lots of dishes, risotto and with pasta as well as abbacchio or suckling lamb. Now, don't forget to try the Colomba, a dove shaped cake made at Easter time, or the tiny little strawberries that pack a flavor punch that appear in springtime too. In late spring, cherries appear. Of course, the cherry blossoms come before them and are gorgeous. And last but not least, zucchini flowers are in bloom, ready for stuffing and frying. They are so, so delicious.

Katy

Now, I bet you're wondering where the best places are to visit in the spring. So as I mentioned, if you're keen to visit the major tourist hotspots without the crowds, this is definitely the time to go. So that's Rome, Florence, Venice, parts of Tuscany that are usually highly visited, such as Siena, San Gimignano, Cortona is another one, and also the Cinque Terre and the Amalfi Coast. They are not as busy. We were in the Amalfi Coast in the springtime and you could easily wander around, and we even drove at that time of year, which I wouldn't recommend in the summertime at all. Now, outside of these areas, some places deserve a special mention because they're particularly beautiful. Earlier, I mentioned that the Italian Lakes are gorgeous in the spring, thanks to their beautiful villa gardens. Sicily is also incredible, thanks to wildflowers, festivals, and manageable temperatures as it does get super hot there in the summer. If you love cherry blossoms, the Emilia region bursts into color thanks to the cherry groves outside of Modena. And in Tuscany, irises, spring lamb, and wildflowers bloom while in Piedmont, the countryside bursts into rolling hills of green with new shoots on the vines and new vintages to try. Some places that aren't so great in Springtime are in the mountains where spring is a break between the busy winter and summer seasons, and many hotels and chairlift operators take their annual breaks. I found that out the hard way, so I'm letting you know so you can avoid that mistake. Puglia can also be a little bit tricky before Easter, which is generally the time that hotels and restaurants reopen in time for the annual season. They like to take things piano piano or slowly, slowly in Puglia, and I can respect that.

Katy

Now, I know that not everyone has the choice of when they can travel, and a big shout out to all of you teachers and parents of children in a perpetual cycle of fixed date vacations. But if you have any discretion about when you travel, have a think about traveling in the Spring

because it is beautiful, less crowded, and the energy is high, and the weather is perfect for sightseeing followed by a lovely plate of pasta.

Katy

Now, I'm letting you know that we have a few spots left on our very Small Group Untold Italy Tours this Spring. If you're considering a last minute escape, you can expect a deep local immersion into an Italian region of your choosing, one that will target your soul and linger in your memories for a very long time. You'll meet the people, visit secret places and eat and drink some of the best meals of your life. You can find out more on untolditalytours.com. And of course, I will put a link into the show notes that appear on your podcast app and on our website.

Katy

And for those of you who like to get ahead with your planning, we have trips to Sicily available for next spring, the spring of 2024. Our Eastern Sicily tour takes you to beautiful Ragusa, which I described to you at the start of the episode with its carpet of pink flowers and stunning gardens.

Katy

If you'd like to read this episode in the transcript and find information on the places I mentioned you can find them online at untolditaly.com/162. Friends, my team does hugely detailed notes for each and every episode which you can find just by adding the episode number to the end of untolditaly.com with a forward slash. That way you can find all the info including place names etc very quickly.

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That's all for today, next week we're heading back to the delicious coastal and mountainous region of Liguria where we're going to hear all about pesto and some amazing pasta dishes. But until then it's ... "ciao for now".